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DE RUEHDM #0415 1231243
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031243Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3408
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0419
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 000415

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PARIS FOR WALLER, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/04/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: SYRIAN PARLIAMENT EXPECTED TO MEET NEXT WEEK,
BASHAR TO SPEAK

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael H. Corbin for reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (U) Syrian President Bashar al-Asad issued a decree calling on the newly elected People's Assembly to meet in its first session on May 7. The Assembly is expected to elect a speaker, deputy speaker and other Assembly officials during that session. The Speaker is then expected to set a date for a subsequent session, likely just a few days later, during which President Asad will deliver a speech to inaugurate the new Parliament.

12. (U) The opening of Parliament is the first step toward setting a date for the upcoming presidential referendum, which is expected to take place at the end of this month. Prior to the referendum, the Ba'ath Party's Regional Command must first send a single proposed candidate (Asad) to the People's Assembly, which in turn then issues an order for the holding of a presidential plebiscite.

13. (C) Campaign posters with Bashar's picture over the background of a Syrian flag and with "2007-2014" and "With You" are already going up around Damascus in preparation for the referendum. Additionally, we have heard from a number of contacts that a dinner for prominent businessmen was recently organized to raise funds to cover the cost celebrating the referendum. Some contacts have told us that Chamber of Commerce President Rateb Shallah organized the dinner, while other contacts reported that regime crony Rami Maklouf is the driving force behind the fund-raising efforts, pressing particularly hard on businessmen who have profited the most from their connections to him and the regime. Still others have reported being called by Asad's brother-in-law and head of Syrian Military Intelligence, Asef Shawkat, and being instructed on specific donations to make (for example, buying a 70-foot banner with Asad's picture on it or paying for a carnival for voters with rides and entertainers).
CORBIN